

Political workout for speakeriada and the government

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The first week of the new parliament of Ukraine – the 4th Verkhovna Rada – may offer some ideas for answers to the questions how important are the parliament's «cadres» that, reportedly, «decide everything», and whose voice will decide the outcome of the competition for the Speaker's seat.

The election of the Speaker may be demonstrative of the configuration of the new parliamentary majority and the ability of some political forces to come to terms with others and make deals. Based on who personally will be elected to lead the parliament, the vector and tone of the relations between the new parliament and the President of Ukraine will be shaped for the next two years, and the issue of the degree of President's influence on the parliament may be clarified. For instance, if the seat of the Speaker is occupied by the recently retired head of the Presidential Administration and leader of the «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» Volodymyr Lytvyn, the President will have much better chances to control the parliament if, say, the Oleksandr Moroz becomes the Speaker.

The new Speaker will have a political role of a mediator between different political forces that are likely to become rivals in the 2004 race, as well as between those forces and the President. Therefore, a new Speaker is preferably someone who is not viewed as a potential presidential candidate. The personality of a new Speaker will be an important factor in determining whether the parliament will be able to engage in a meaningful dialogue and work constructively.

However, predictions as to who may become the Speakers are as good as any predictions, as it is impossible to be 100 percent sure about true feelings and intentions of claimants for that seat, as well as about readiness of factions to abide by earlier agreements. To date the only announced (though informal) alliance is the declared agreement between Nasha Ukraina, Yulia Tymoshenko block, the Communists and the Socialists about the intention to coordinate their actions in the new parliament. The announcement was the first signal for a situational majority and demonstrated readiness of the above political forces to oppose the pro-presidential forces. On the other hand, the agreement may be seen as a signal indicating that Nasha Ukraina is prepared to position itself away from the Presidential wing. Though, it is unlikely that such a «multi-polar» construction will be stable. It is also difficult to say definitely what the true position of the Nasha Ukraina will be, for previously the block tended to make advances to the pro-presidential blocks.

The duration and the results of the likely «speakeriada» and the distribution of the parliamentary committees will demonstrate the true tone of agreements and the real roles of each of the players involved. Noteworthy, before the meeting of leaders of all six forces that made it to the

parliament leader of Nasha Ukraina Victor Yushchenko, leader of the Communist party Petro Symonenko, Yulia Tymoshenko and leader of the Socialists Oleksandr Moroz discussed at a joint meeting the issue of election of the leadership of the parliament. As the press service of Nasha Ukraina put it, «the meeting addressed approaches to formation of the presidium of the Verkhovna Rada, the issues of election of the chairman of the Rada [i.e., the Speaker], the first vice chairman and the vice chairman, as well as principles of distribution of the committees between the factions.»

On May 10 leaders of the six blocks and parties gathered to discuss the election of the new leadership of the parliament and distribution of the committees. According to Roman Bezsmertnyi of Nasha Ukraina, the discussion was a rather tense one. Yet, according to Petro Symonenko, the meeting agreed that at the start all of the factions would nominate their candidates and then would publicly give reasons in support of each of the nominee. Hence, there will be «packages» of candidates. After the parliament's leadership is elected, the distribution of the committees will take place in accordance with election results gained by the parties and blocks represented in the parliament. Some political appetites are likely to be satisfied with positions of vice speakers, so the bargaining will be serious.

It is difficult, though, to tell who personally will win the current «speakeriada». The most frequently names candidates include Speaker of the 3rd parliament Ivan Pliushch and leader of the «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» Volodymyr Lytvyn. It is likely that the latter's further political career will be determined by the result of the parliament's vote on the speaker issue. If he wins, he will leave his office as the presidential chief of staff. Then, as rumour had it, the top job in the administration may be taken by Yuri Kravchenko, the infamous «hero» of the Gongadze scandal, formerly dismissed Minister of Interior and now head of the Kherson regional state administration. Such a controversial appointment of this controversial personality may cause a strongly negative reaction among the opposition. Meanwhile, the arrival of Kravchenko to the «big politics» may change substantially the existing balance of forces around the President.

Leader of Nasha Ukraina Victor Yushchenko stated clearly that the block would nominate its candidate but he would not run. While no names have been named yet, it is likely that the nominee could be Petro Poroshenko, leader of the Solidarity party and Yushchenko's main ally. Judging from Yushchenko's statements, the block has reached some understanding with the competitors for influence in the parliament – the «ZaYedU»: he «hinted that Nasha Ukraina would support a candidate of the «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» for the position of the First Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, but would oppose candidates for the leadership of the parliament from the Social-Democratic Party (United)» (www.korrespondent.net, May 10, 2002).

The Socialist party of Ukraine is also getting ready for wrestling for leadership of the parliament. Leader of the Socialists Oleksandr Moroz, who was the Speaker of the 2nd parliament, announced that his party would probably nominate him for the job again. He objected, however, to being nominated as a candidate for the position of the Vice Speaker, claiming that there would be no need for the position as he already occupied a rather high position of the leader of the SPU faction. According to Moroz, the SPU may offer several candidates for the positions of Vice Speakers: Stanislav Nikolayenko, Josyp Vinsky, Vitaly Shybko, etc. On May 11, Oleksandr

Moroz announced that his party would not support candidates for the position of the Speaker and Vice Speakers nominated by the «ZaYedU» and the SDPU(o). «We will support all except the block «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» and the SDPU(o), he said (www.korrespondent.net, may 11, 2002). Yet, he argues that the parliament's leadership should include representatives of Nasha Ukraina and the Communists.

The Communists also have their nominees for the leading positions. They approved a «political decision about the working presidium of the session» and a «package» of candidates. According to Symonenko, the party will claim leadership of the committees «for economic affairs, issues of the budget, economic and industrial policies, defense, foreign affairs, social and youth policies» (www.for-ua.com, May 11, 2002). He also hinted that the Communists see election of «their» Speaker as their top priority. How serious the wish is and how much the Communists are prepared to devote much effort for making the wish come true. Given the fact that a hypothetical majority exists, there is a room for political bargaining. The Communists will be able to play their own game on the contradictions between the strongest forces in the parliament, and achieve their goal if their candidate might be considered as a compromise that might stop the lengthy «speakeriada». Naturally, Yulia Tymoshenko's block and the SDPU(o) have their own ideas as to who should be the leader of the parliament.

However, the parliament is only one part of the power triangle – the President – the government - the parliament. The government is also undergoing a major shake-up. Coordinator of the «ZaYedU» Ivan Kyrilenko left his position of the Minister of the Agrarian Reform and went to «create an agrarian lobby» in the parliament. His seat was occupied at the end of April by Serhiy Ryzhuk, state secretary of that ministry and presidential assistant in 1996-1997. Minister of Industrial Policy Vasyl Gurieyev also gave up his job in the government for a parliamentary seat.

Minister of Transport and leader of the People's Democratic Party also chose the seat in the parliament and left the government to build up his party. He was replaced by director of the Ukrainian Railway Georgy Kyrpa who reportedly managed to make the railroads profit-making and got over UAH 40 million of net profits in 2001 (as reported at www.uz.gov.ua).

Oleksandr Lavrynovych, elected within the Nasha Ukraina list, chose to become the Minister of Justice instead. Before the elections Lavrynovych occupied the position of the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice. Other top executive officials who got seats within the blocks' lists include Volodymyr Semynozhenko and Vasyl Kremin. Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh, number 2 in the «Za YedU» list published a statement on May 7 claiming that «Being aware of the whole personal responsibility for the social and economic development of this country, the necessity to provide for effective operation of bodies of state governance, I, in full compliance with the Ukrainian law, have decided to give up the honorable mandate of the people's deputy of Ukraine in favor of professional work in the government» (Interfax-Ukraine, May 7, 2002).

According to observers, Anatoly Kinakh, seen by many as a figure of compromise, is likely to stay in his office for quite a while. He is seen as a compromise because he has never stated any intention to become a president and, consciously or otherwise, managed to distance himself from political games. As a compromise figure, he may become increasingly valuable in the eyes of President Kuchma as the President begins to lose control over the parliament. It is unlikely that

any candidate to replace Kinakh , proposed by the President to the parliament, will be approved. Yet, some forces within Nasha Ukraina, namely the Party of Reforms and Order», have repeatedly announced that the position of the prime minister should be given to Victor Yushchenko. The other thing is whether such a move would be to the benefit of Yushchenko, as he will hardly be given the same vast powers he enjoyed during his previous time as the prime minister.

New appointment made by the President of Ukraine suggest that a popular political game called «a coalition government» is over. There is growing awareness of this in the new parliament, though some illusions persist. «Making new personnel appointments today is not justified,» says former political coordinator of Victor Yushchenko's block Roman Bezsmertnyi. In his view, it would be more appropriate to «form the model of the new parliament first» and then make personnel appointment taking into account the configuration of political forces. He also argues that most of the recent personnel reshuffles do not match the political configuration and are made against the 2002 election results.

In political games, particularly in the Verkhovna Rada, much is done «against» something – see, for instance, beefing up of the «Za YedU» faction by majoritarian candidates. Yet, the «speakeriada», the «training regarding the real division of forces in the parliament» (as Volodymyr Filenko MP put it) will demonstrate who can solve problems in the new parliament and by what methods, and how strong the influence on the parliament from the outside can be. Also, it is possible that if the outside influence is minimized, the parliament might get back to the coalition government theme that may change the balance of forces in the notorious triangle President-parliament-government. Meanwhile, the «workout» goes on.